

Jefferson County Courthouse  
531 W. Jefferson Street  
Louisville  
Jefferson County  
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-117

HABS,

KY.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JEFFERSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

HABS No. KY-117

Location: 531 W. Jefferson Street, Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky.

USGS New Albany, Indiana-Kentucky Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 16/608540/4234580

Present Owner: Jefferson County.

Present Use: County Courthouse.

Significance: Designed in 1835 by the noted Greek Revival architect, Gideon Shryock, the Jefferson County Courthouse stands as one of the major surviving monuments to that style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erections: 1836-1842, 1858-1860. Although plans for the courthouse were completed in 1835, work was not begun until 1836. Worked limped along, suffering from the financial panic of 1837, until it was halted in 1842 with the building enclose and the ground floor finished. Work was resumed in 1858 and completed in 1860. Undertaken were the finishing of the interior, except for the east room of the top floor, and the finishing of the west facade. The east room of the top floor was finished in the remodeling of 1906.
2. Architect: Gideon Shryock was the author of the design accepted by a joint city and county building committee in 1835. When construction began in 1836 he was given the position of city architect in which he supervised work on the courthouse. Following the results of a city election in 1842, a new city administration terminated the official responsibilities of Shryock. Prior to the termination a great furor had been raised when it was discovered that the stone used in construction was of such a poor quality that it began spalling almost immediately after erection. There was also a controversy with the brick contractor over the number of bricks used. These two controversies, although never proven to be caused by Shryock, served to help ruin his reputation.

Gideon Shryock was born on November 15, 1802 in Lexington, Kentucky. He was the third child and second son of Mathias and Mary Elizabeth Gaugh Shryock who had left Frederick County, Maryland and settled in Lexington in the 1780s. Altogether, eleven children were born to them (four who died in infancy). A "house-joiner," Mathias interested three of his sons, Gideon, Montgomery, and Cincinnatus, in architecture. Following early training at Mr. Aldridge's Lancastrian School in Lexington, Gideon was apprenticed to his father's job.

He then traveled to Philadelphia where he worked under William Strickland, Greek Revival architect of that city. At that time he made plans to travel to Washington, Baltimore, and New York City, but it is not known if he did. On June 30, 1829 he married Elizabeth Pendleton Bacon. Ten children were born to them, two of whom died in their youth. One son, William Strickland Shryock, was named in honor of his Philadelphia mentor. Another son, James Guthrie Shryock, was named in honor of the mayor of Louisville under whose auspices Gideon Shryock received the Courthouse commission.

The years of 1827-42 were the most successful of Shryock's career. In 1827 he was awarded the premium in the competition for the design of the State Capitol at Frankfort, Kentucky, now known as the Old State House. From 1829-1833 Shryock built Morrison College in Lexington for Transylvania University. In 1832 he drew the plans and specifications for the Franklin County Courthouse in Frankfort and in 1833 he did the same for the Arkansas State Capitol. Early in 1835 Shryock designed the Orlando Brown house in Frankfort and in November of that year he was appointed City Architect for Louisville and began supervision of the courthouse there. While in Louisville he designed the Louisville Medical Institute in 1837 which was completed in 1839.

Following his dismissal as City Architect in 1842 Shryock lived the remainder of his life in relative obscurity. Although he maintained his architectural practice almost until his death, it is not known that he received any major commissions. Tied firmly to the Greek Revival style, he was lost in the wake of the subsequent Revival styles. His only known other work is the Shryock monument in Lexington, Kentucky's Episcopal cemetery, built for his father following his death in the cholera epidemic of 1833. It, too, is in the Greek Revival style, being a miniature Greek temple. An ardent Baptist and a Thirty-Third Degree Mason, Shryock may have designed buildings for either organization, although none have been documented. Following his death in Louisville, Kentucky at his home on June 19, 1880, he was buried in the family lot in Cave Hill Cemetery. Prior to his death, in 1874, he had served as first president of the Kentucky Association of Architects.

Albert Fink was the architect who supervised completion of the courthouse in 1858-1860. Primarily an engineer, Fink is noted for inventing the Fink truss, which he used in the erection of many bridges. His work on the courthouse roughly paralleled the earlier plan by Shryock. He built the tetrastyle portico of the south facade, rather than the proposed hexastyle portico, and omitted tetrastyle porticoes on the east and west facades. On the interior he was responsible for the erection of the rotunda dome, rather than the cupola proposed by Shryock, the great iron staircase leading from the second to the third floor, and the iron infilling

of the first floor rotunda well. These were the major deviations from the original design. The rest of the interior followed the original intentions of Gideon Shryock.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Jefferson County Courthouse is located on lot 1 of block 14-E in the City of Louisville. The lot consists of two acres bounded by Fifth and Sixth Streets on the east and west and West Jefferson Street and an alley on the south and north. The west half of the lot was designated for use as a public square for the purpose of county government by Act of Virginia, May 1, 1780. The following references to the deeds for the eastern half of the lot are found in the Jefferson, County, Kentucky Deed Books:

1836 Deed, July 9, 1836, recorded in Deed Book TT, page 13. William C. Williams and Hannah Williams sold a lot fronting 110 feet on Fifth Street and running back 105 feet, being 100 feet north of the northwest corner of the intersection of Fifth and Jefferson Streets, to the City of Louisville for \$16,500.

1836 Deed, July 9, 1836, recorded in Deed Book TT, page 28. William Pope, representing himself and other heirs, sold a lot beginning at a point 156 feet west of the northwest corner of the intersection of Fifth and Jefferson Streets, running 54 feet west, thence 210 feet north, thence 105 feet east, thence 60 feet south, thence 26 feet, 3 inches west, thence 45 feet south, thence 24 feet, 9 inches west, thence 105 feet south to the point of beginning, to the City of Louisville for \$12,450.

1836 Deed, July 9, 1836, recorded in Deed Book TT, page 82. John Kennedy and Francis Kennedy sold a lot fronting 26 feet, 3 inches on Jefferson Street and running back 105 feet, being 105 feet west of the northwest corner of the intersection of Fifth and Jefferson Streets, to the City of Louisville for \$2,250.

1836 Deed, July 9, 1836, recorded in Deed Book TT, page 239. David H. Merriwether and Lydia C. Merriwether sold a lot measuring 85 feet on Fifth Street and 105 feet on Jefferson Street, located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Fifth and Jefferson Streets, to the City of Louisville for \$18,000.

1836 Deed, September 1, 1836, recorded in Deed Book TT, page 521. Jemima Douglass of Nashville, Tennessee sold a lot fronting 24 feet, 9 inches on Jefferson Street and running back 150 feet, being 131 feet, 3 inches west of the northwest corner of the intersection of Fifth and Jefferson Streets, to the City of Louisville for \$6,800.

No deed is recorded in the Jefferson County Deed Books for the purchase of a lot fronting 15 feet on Fifth Street and running back 105 feet, being 85 feet north of the northwest corner of the intersection of Fifth and Jefferson Streets, and belonging to Miss Sarah Dubberly in 1836.

No deed is recorded in the Jefferson County Deed Books transferring title of the eastern half of the Courthouse lot from the City of Louisville to Jefferson County. The city originally purchased this land as its portion of the costs in erecting the Courthouse, which was intended for use both by the city and the county.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

Marble Hill Quarry, near Madison, Indiana..original limestone  
John Holburn.....cut stone  
Richardson and Kerlin.....brickwork  
William H. Grainger.....ironwork  
J. Longest.....bricks  
Francis P. Coleman.....superintendent of brick construction  
Irwin and Willson.....plasterwork  
Mr. Kaye.....basement plasterwork  
Brian and Gettings.....carpentry  
Mr. Beatty.....iron pipes and sewer  
David Nevin.....flagging  
Mr. Manning.....painting  
James Gibbs.....stone carving  
Hicks and Richards.....covering for courthouse\*  
\*Because the stone began spalling badly soon after erection, Shryock proposed an encaustic solution to be applied. Apparently this is the "covering for courthouse," which Hicks and Richards applied.

Contractors for the construction undertaken under Fink are as follow:  
Bedford Quarry, Bedford, Indiana.....limestone for portico  
C.S. Stancliffe.....general superintendent  
J.L.C. Matthews.....general contractor  
Mr. Coleman.....stonework  
Mr. O'Bannon.....plasterwork

5. Original plans and construction: No plans of the courthouse are known to survive, although Shryock was ordered to give them to the records department of the city. However, a view by Shryock of the courthouse as originally intended survives in Haldeman's City Directory for 1844-1845. A thorough architectural description accompanied the view, with a cost estimate of \$430,000.

6. Alterations and additions: The history of the courthouse has been one of virtually continuous alteration. Following is a list of major alterations undertaken:  
1843 Hot water heating apparatus in basement replaced with stoves.  
1854 Tornado, August 27, 1854, damaged roof, later replaced with copper.

- 1858 Exterior walls oiled to prevent further spalling.
- 1867 Statue of Henry Clay, costing \$5,000 by Joel T. Hart, noted Kentucky sculptor, installed in second floor rotunda with encircling iron railing.
- 1906 Following a fire December 26, 1905 in which the timber roof was destroyed, Brinton Beauregard Davis (1862-1953), noted architect, was commissioned to replace the roof, fireproof the building, and make other improvements. Included were the following:
- Replacement of all windows.
  - Rewiring and relighting of entire building
  - Installation of mezzanine and galleries in the Clerk's Office, Law Library, and third floor east and west rooms.
  - Removal of wood doors, trim, cabinets and replacements with metal components.
  - Construction of new concrete roof with steel trusses and tar and gravel surface.
  - Construction of small entrance porticos of reinforced concrete located as follows: one each at east and west ends, two flanking central portico on south side and two on north side.
  - Construction of service core in center of rear, north facade, containing stairs, elevators, rest rooms, ground floor office, and three-story bridge to annex at north.
  - Construction of archives space in former attic space at east end of building.
  - Covering of exterior with stucco facing simulating stone and preventing further spalling.
  - Installation of ornate iron lanterns on exterior corners of the building.
  - Installation of ground floor bathrooms.

Besides renovating the courthouse, Davis executed the following buildings:

Broadway School.....Louisville  
Hotel Ansley.....Atlanta  
Henry Watterson Hotel.....Louisville  
Inter-Southern Life Building, across Fifth Street from Courthouse  
.....Louisville  
Armory.....Louisville  
High School.....Hopkinsville, Ky.  
State Normal School.....Bowling Green, Ky.  
Residence of W.M. Atkinson.....Louisville  
Crescent Hill Baptist Church.....Louisville  
Residence of J.E. Newman.....Louisville

- 1949 Modernization was undertaken at a cost of \$75,000. The architect in charge was Walter C. Wagner, of Louisville. New elevators were installed, and plumbing, wiring, and lighting were updated, as well as improvements made to various offices.

October 1966 - January 1967 Under the direction of Lawrence Bates, Louisville architect and Joseph Haas, contractor, the former courtroom, located on the second floor, north side, immediately east of the rotunda, was partitioned and divided into two floors. An outer secretary's office, a new courtroom, a stairway, a judge's office, and a bathroom were installed. Relandscaping was also undertaken.

- B. Historical Context: The Jefferson County Courthouse has been the site of many historical events. The large portico of the courthouse has proven to be an ideal speaker's platform with the large open areas around the courthouse providing ample room for audiences. Presidents, presidential candidates and candidates for political offices from the national to the local levels have spoken here. Flag Day and Memorial Day services have been held here, the courthouse providing a convenient terminus for parades. One of the earliest, and possibly the largest event held at the courthouse was the dedication of the statue of Henry Clay by Joel T. Hart on May 30, 1867. Following a large torchlight parade, dedication ceremonies were held in the rotunda around the statue with an enormous crowd spilling out and covering the entire front yard. Highlights of the ceremony included numerous speeches and an opening ode by Fortunatus Cosby and sung by a choir.

Building committees were originally appointed from both the city and the county consisting of the following individuals:

- From the County: David Merriwether  
James W. Thornberry  
George Hitter  
John Doup  
Robert Miller
- From the City: Mr. Geiger  
Mr. Spurrier  
Mr. McCalaster  
Mr. James Harrison  
Mr. Weir

Constructed with the view of luring the state government to move the Capitol from Frankfort to Louisville, the courthouse stood partially vacant for most of the 19th century. Much bitterness developed over the issue and it was common, even as late as the 1890s, for Louisville to send its annual delegation to Frankfort to woo the legislators into the courthouse in Louisville. First proposed at a scale five times larger than actually built, by James Guthrie, mayor of Louisville, the building until its completion in 1860 received the derisive title of "Guthrie's Folly."

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### General description:

Main (south) entrance to the Greek Revival building is through the imposing tetrastyle portico. A Thomas Jefferson statue stands in front of the portico. On all elevations, between the pilasters, on the first and second floors, are the rows of long windows. Triglyphs decorate the cornice, which runs throughout the building. Guttae is found only under the cornice of the pediments of the south portico and the side pavilions. The handsome double doors in the front doorway each have six panels, and are possibly original. Eleven bays define either the south or north elevation while the east and west elevations are each five bays.

The two-story building also includes the basement which has been partitioned into numerous small spaces. The first and second floor plans contain rooms of considerable sizes, and these house the County Clerk's Office, Fiscal Court Room, Law Library, Circuit Court Clerk and others. The most notable interior feature of the building is the rotunda which occupies the central part of the second floor. Standing in the rotunda is the statue of Henry Clay, and above it are the skylights.

## PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### A. Early Views:

View of Courthouse as originally designed is found in Haldeman's City Directory for 1844-1845.

Photograph of fire in Courthouse roof is found in the Louisville Herald, December 27, 1905.

Photographs of Courthouse are found in a newspaper article, "Historic Courthouse at Fifth and Jefferson Streets," Courier-Journal, March 25, 1913.

### B. Interview: Dr. Samuel W. Thomas, Jefferson County Archivist, August 23, 1974, in his office, room 601, Jefferson County Courthouse, Louisville. Discussed was alterations and repairs to the building, especially those undertaken in 1966.

### C. Bibliography:

#### 1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books located in the Clerk's Office, Jefferson County Courthouse, Louisville, Kentucky.

Jefferson County Court Minute Order Book 17, located in the Jefferson County Archives, room 601, Jefferson County Courthouse, Louisville, Kentucky. See following pages:

Page	Date	Page	Date	Page	Date	Page	Date
28	2/2/1835	66	5/5/1835	173	4/4/1836	208	7/8/1836
39	2/13/1835	68	5/9/1835	174	4/4/1836	211	7/9/1836
48	4/6/1835	74	6/1/1835	190	6/6/1836	241	11/10/1836
56	4/11/1835	108	9/12/1835	196	6/7/1836	265	1/2/1837
57	4/15/1835	111	9/19/1835	202	7/4/1836	293	4/3/1837
63	5/4/1835	166	3/8/1836	203	7/4/1836	296	4/3/1837

Journal of the Common Council of Louisville, located in City Hall, 601 West Jefferson Street, Louisville, Kentucky. See following:

Book	Page	Date	Page	Date
3/10/1834-6/29/1835	350	3/4/1835	418	4/14/1835
	407	4/6/1835	452	5/9/1835
6/6/1835-9/12/1836			488	6/29/1835
	32	7/27/1835	195	11/23/1835
	75	9/3/1835	214	12/14/1835
	84	9/7/1835	258	5/20/1836
	115	9/21/1835	261	5/20/1836
	186	11/16/1835	401	6/20/1836
	9/19/1836-6/15/1838	149	4/3/1837	376
	154	4/17/1837	387	12/11/1837
	173	4/27/1837	429	2/5/1838
	197	5/22/1837	487	4/9/1838
	270	8/5/1837	499	4/25/1838
	313	9/18/1837	501	4/30/1838
	319	9/25/1837	503	4/30/1838
	329	10/16/1837	515	5/14/1838
	330	10/16/1837		
6/25/1838-4/27/1840	106	11/12/1838	238	6/10/1839
	214	5/13/1839		
5/11/1840-12/27/1840	15	5/18/1840	363	7/12/1841
	59	7/6/1840	382	8/9/1841
	70	7/20/1840	405	9/6/1841
	136	10/12/1840	410	9/20/1841
	157	11/9/1840	423	8/21/1841
	169	11/18/1840	453	11/15/1841
	177	12/7/1840	480	12/13/1841
	204	1/4/1841	481	12/17/1841
	217	1/18/1841	482	12/17/1841
	228	2/1/1840	487	12/27/1841
	241	2/15/1840		

1/3/1842-8/5/1843	45	1/3/1842	259	9/5/1842
	49	2/21/1842	277	10/3/1842
	52	2/28/1842	307	11/1/1842
	112	4/18/1842	311	11/16/1842
	142	5/16/1842	340	12/26/1842
	176	6/13/1842	336	12/26/1842
	197	7/11/1842	348	1/9/1842
	226	8/8/1842		
	252	8/22/1842		
5/15/1857-12/30/1858	128	9/10/1857	284	2/25/1858
	133	9/17/1857	289	3/21/1858
	149	8/1/1857	401	6/10/1858
1/6/1859-12/30/1860	239	9/19/1858	401	4/3/1860
	288	11/25/1858	598	11/18/1860

Board of Alderman Journals located in City Hall, 601 West Jefferson Street, Louisville, Kentucky. See following:

Book	Page	Date
5/14/1857-	214	2/25/1858
12/30/1858	217	3/4/1858
	221	3/4/1858
Book No. 14	16	1873
	23	1873
	30	1873
	281	1/8/1874

Jefferson County Court Minute Order Book 2, located in the Jefferson County Archives, Room 601, Jefferson County Courthouse, Louisville, Kentucky. See following pages:

Page 359, June 3, 1858 and page 401, June 3, 1858.

Court Record Book 4, located in the Jefferson County Archives, Room 601, Jefferson County Courthouse, Louisville, Kentucky, see pages 301-304, December 27, 1905.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Louisville City Directories for the years 1836 through 1860, especially Haldeman's City Directory for 1844-1845.

Louisville Today, published by Sam McDowell Anderson, Louisville, 1912.

Filson Club History Quarterly, vol 22, 1948. See articles:

"The Jefferson County Courthouse," p. 5.

"Some Historical Notes Relating to the Courthouse of Jefferson County, Kentucky," by Charles K. Needham, Jan. 3, 1927.

"A History of the Jefferson County Courthouse," by Charles B. Seymour, January 3, 1921.

"Fireproofing of Jefferson County Courthouse," by Brinton B. Davis.

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Johnston, J. Stoddard. Memorial History of Louisville from its First Settlement to the Year 1896. Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Company, 1896.

Papers:

Barker, Thomas A., "A History of the Jefferson County Courthouse," read before the Filson Club, May 7, 1934. First read before the Barrister's Law Club.

Field, Elizabeth Shryock, "Gideon Shryock, His Life and His Work," April 1934.

Price, Caroline, "The Louisville Buildings by Gideon Shryock, senior thesis, University of Louisville, January 5, 1943.

Newspaper clippings:

Article, Louisville Daily Journal, October 28, 1839, vol. 9, no. 278, p. 2, cols. 1, 2.

Article, Louisville Daily Journal, November 2, 1839, vol. 9, no. 283, p. 2, cols. 1, 2.

Article, Family Magazine, 1840, p. 285.

Article, Louisville Public Advertiser, December 11, 1841, p. 1.

"The Courthouse," Louisville Daily Democrat, July 1, 1859.

- "The Clay Monument Celebration," Louisville Daily Democrat, May 29, 1867.
- "The Clay Statue," Louisville Daily Democrat, May 30, 1867.
- "Unveiling of Clay Statue," Louisville Daily Journal, May 30, 1867.
- "The Clay Statue," Louisville Daily Courier, May 31, 1867.
- "The Clay Statue," Louisville Daily Democrat, May 31, 1867.
- "The Clay Statue," Louisville Daily Journal, May 31, 1867.
- "Hart's Statue of Clay," Louisville Daily Journal, May 31, 1867.
- "Death of Gideon Shryock," Courier-Journal, June 22, 1880.
- "The Temple of Justice," Courier-Journal, June 17, 1883.
- "Courthouse in Flames," Courier-Journal, December 27, 1905.
- "First Intended For Capitol of Kentucky," Courier-Journal, December 27, 1905.
- "Famous Clay Statue Work Of Joel T. Hart," Courier-Journal, December 27, 1905.
- "Clay Statue is Injured in Fire at Courthouse," Louisville Herald, December 27, 1905.
- "Necessitates Makeshifts," Louisville Herald, December 27, 1905.
- "Records Suffered Little From Fire," Louisville Herald, December 27, 1905.
- "Historic Courthouse at Fifth and Jefferson Streets," Courier-Journal, March 25, 1913.
- "Venerable Jefferson County Courthouse Is Doomed to Go," Herald-Post January 31, 1926.
- "Albert Fink, Courthouse Builder," Courier-Journal Magazine, December 11, 1949.
- "The Courthouse Was An' Architect's Nightmare'", by Melville O. Briney, Louisville Times, November 21, 1957.

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
Spring 1981

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance of Louisville and Jefferson County, Inc. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1974 at the HABS Field Office in Louisville by Prof. John Haggard, (Syracuse University), Project Supervisor; David Arbogast (Columbia University), Project Historian; Mary Oehrlein, Project Foreman; Bayer Lee (City College of New York), Architect; and Mary M. Herd (University of Tennessee) and Charles Raith (University of Cincinnati), student assistant architects. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written descriptive data in the spring of 1981, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher took the photographs of the structures in 1979.

ADDENDUM TO  
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